

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03

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P R 061549Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9108

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 11446

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- APRIL 1975

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REFS: (A) PARIS 10475; (B) PARIS 9272; (C) PARIS 9805;
(D) PARIS 9991

SUMMARY. IF APRIL WAS NOT THE CRUELEST MONTH, IT WAS FAR FROM BEING THE MOST DECISIVE FRANCE HAS RECENTLY KNOWN. AFTER SIX WEEKS OF PREPARATION, A CENSURE DEBATE IN THE ASSEMBLY PRODUCED ONLY A RINGING STATEMENT OF FRENCH STRATEGIC INDEPENDENCE BY PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC AND LUKEWARM FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF) ATTACKS ON FRENCH MEMBERSHIP IN NATO. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S POLLED POPULARITY DROPPED BY THREE POINTS. A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ENDED A NINE-WEEK LONG RENAULT STRIKE. JEAN-PIERRE FOURCADE, MINISTER OF THE ECONOMY AND FINANCES, ANNOUNCED THAT A MILLION UNEMPLOYED BY THE END OF THE YEAR WAS/NOT UNTHINKABLE." AND FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) FIRST SECRETARY, FINALLY WENT TO MOSCOW AFTER HAVING SEEN HIS VISIT POSTPONED FOR A FOURTH TIME AT SOVIET REQUEST. DURING APRIL FRANCE SEEMED TO GLANCE AT SOME OF ITS MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS, AGREE THAT LONG-RANGE SOLUTIONS SHOULD BE SOUGHT FOR THEM, AND THEN COLLECTIVELY TURN ITS BACK ON THEM TO CONCENTRATE ON AN EARLY SPRING AND A FOOTBALL CLUB WHICH MADE IT INTO THE SEMI-FINALS OF THE EUROPEAN CUP COMPETITION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT - REFLECTION. GISCARD OPENED THE MONTH OF APRIL BY LEADING 22 SENIOR MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT INTO A WEEKEND RETREAT (APRIL 5-6) AT THE GOVERNMENT'S CHATEAU DE RAMBOUILLET FOR WHAT WAS BILLED AS A PERIOD OF MEDITATION AND REFLECTION ON THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS OVER THE LAST TEN MONTHS. THE INNOVATION RECEIVED GOOD PRESS BUT NO RESULTS OR NEW PROGRAMS WERE ANNOUNCED. ELYSEE AND MATIGNON SOURCES TOLD US THAT GISCARD'S PRIMARY PURPOSE WAS TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION AND THINKING BY EACH MINISTER ON POSSIBLE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN HIS RESPECTIVE ORGANIZATION.

2. GOVERNMENT RHETORIC - THE CENSURE DEBATE. A FEW DAYS LATER, PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC FACED THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON A CENSURE MOTION DEPOSITED BY 53 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEPUTIES OF THE UNITED LEFT (NEITHER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND NOR GEORGES MARCHAIS, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY -- PCF -- SIGNED THE MOTION). THE CENSURE MOTION GENERATED LITTLE ENTHUSIASM, EVEN ON THE LEFT, WHERE IT WAS PERCEIVED AS A FORMALITY DESIGNED TO ALLOW THE UNION OF THE LEFT TO PROMOTE A FACADE OF UNITY. THE ENSUING DEBATE WAS HO-HUM; THE ONLY HIGH POINT CAME WHEN CHIRAC RESPONDED TO PCF ATTACKS -- IN

WHICH THE PS DID NOT JOIN -- ON FRENCH MEMBERSHIP IN
NATO BY ONE OF THE TOUGHEST STATEMENTS OF NATIONAL
INDEPENDENCE BY A GOF OFFICIAL SINCE POMPIDOU'S DAY.
CHIRAC AFFIRMED THAT FRANCE REMAINED FREE TO PURSUE ITS
POLICIES, CALLED THE POLITICAL SIDE OF NATO A FORUM
IN WHICH FRANCE COULD ASSERT ITSELF AND STRESSED
FRANCE'S COMMITMENT TO ITS NATIONAL NUCLEAR DETERRENT.
CHIRAC ACCURATELY ANALYZED PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE
CENSURE MOTION WHEN HE TERMED IT "THE POLITICS OF THE
PAST."

3. THE ECONOMY - RELAUNCHING. IN SOMETHING SHORT OF
A FULL-SCALE REHEATING OF THE ECONOMY, GISCARD USED
HIS FIRESIDE CHAT OF APRIL 23 AND A SUBSEQUENT PRESS
CONFERENCE BY FINANCE MINISTER FOURCADE TO ANNOUNCE
SOME 15.5 BILLION FRANCS IN NEW GOVERNMENT SPENDING TO
STIMULATE THE ECONOMY THROUGH PRODUCTIVE INVESTMENT

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(REF A). WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON TAX RELIEF FOR PRODUCTIVE
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INVESTMENT, AIDS TO NATIONALIZED INDUSTRY AND PLANT
RECONVERSION AND SUBSIDIZED LOANS TO PROMOTE INCREASED
OUTPUT, EMPLOYMENT, ENERGY SAVINGS AND EXPORT
CAPACITY, THE PROGRAM WAS SHARPLY CRITICIZED BY THE
OPPOSITION AS BEING "TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE, FOR A GOAL
TOO FAR AWAY," AND AS OF NO DIRECT HELP TO THE AVERAGE
FRENCHMAN. GISCARD RECEIVED HIS MOST FAVORABLE REACTION
TO A 4.2 BILLION FRANC CREDIT TO THE 1975-1976 BUDGET
FOR ACCELERATED IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FRENCH TELEPHONE
SYSTEM.

4. UNEMPLOYMENT - GLOOM ON FRENCH LABOR DAY. THE GOF
IS ADOPTING A MORE PUBLICLY FRANK STANCE ON UNEMPLOY-
MENT. MINISTER OF LABOR MICHEL DURAFOUR DECLARED MAY 1
THAT FULL EMPLOYMENT IN FRANCE COULD ONLY COME WITH A
5 PERCENT ANNUAL GROWTH RATE, THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE
SUCH GROWTH COULD COME DURING THE CURRENT YEAR AND THAT
CONSEQUENTLY FRENCHMEN WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT THE IDEA
THAT FULL EMPLOYMENT COULD ONLY COME AS THE RESULT OF
CUTS IN WORK HOURS. IN THE PAST WEEK, VARIOUS GOF
SPOKESMEN HAVE SAID THAT A MILLION UNEMPLOYED BY THE
END OF 1975 WOULD NOT BE "UNREALISTIC," ALTHOUGH
MINISTER OF FINANCE FOURCADE, AT LEAST SAID HE DID NOT
BELIEVE THE FIGURE WOULD BE REACHED. IF SUCH PESSIMISM
ONLY CONFIRMS WHAT THE LEFT OPPOSITION HAS BEEN SAYING
FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS, IT HAS NOT YET, HOWEVER, HAD
A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON FRENCH POLITICAL LIFE. THE
GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM FOR RE-LAUNCHING THE ECONOMY IS,
IN THE FACE OF FEARS OF OVERHEATING THE ECONOMY,

CONSERVATIVE. OPPOSITION CLAMOR FOR MORE DIRECT MEASURES CAN BE EXPECTED TO MOUNT WITH THE EXPECTED RISE IN UNEMPLOYMENT AS THE YEAR GOES ON. THE ONE FAINTLY POSITIVE NOTE IN FRANCE'S ECONOMIC PICTURE AT MONTH'S END CAME ON APRIL 29, WHEN FOURCADE ANNOUNCED THAT THE MARCH PRICE RISE WAS 0.8 PERCENT (EQUAL TO THE FEBRUARY FIGURES).

5. THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY

AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF A SOFRES-FIGARO POLL RELEASED APRIL 16 WHICH SHOWED THAT GISCARD'S PERSONAL POPULARITY HAD DROPPED FROM 56 PERCENT TO 53 PERCENT, THE UDR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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(GAULLISTS) AND GISCARD'S INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS (RI) SPENT APRIL EMULATING EACH OTHER AS EACH TRIED TO PROVE ITSELF MORE DEVOTED TO "CHANGE-WITHOUT-RISK" THAN ITS RIVAL. WITH ONE AURORE PARTY POLL SHOWING THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE UNITED LEFT AT 47 PERCENT (PCF 13 PERCENT; PS 34 PERCENT) AND THE MAJOR TWO-THIRDS OF THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY AT 41 PERCENT (UDR 13 PERCENT; RI 28 PERCENT), THE RESULT WAS TO CONFIRM THAT BOTH PARTIES REMAIN INDISPENSABLE TO THE GISCARDIAN MAJORITY (THE POLL DID NOT ASK FOR PREFERENCES INVOLVING LEFT RADICALS OR CENTRISTS). THE UDR HAS BEGUN PREPARATION FOR NATIONAL ASSIZES IN NICE (JUNE 14-15) INTENDED TO CONSECRATE THE GAULLIST MOVEMENT'S COMEBACK AND PUT A RENEWED PARTY STRUCTURE IN PLACE FOR UPCOMING LOCAL, REGIONAL, MUNICIPAL (1977) AND EVENTUAL NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THE RI, CHEERED BY THE AURORE POLL, CONTINUES TO BEHAVE LIKE A MAJOR PARTY. RI SECRETARY-GENERAL JACQUES DOMINATI, AFTER RASHLY DECLARING EARLY IN APRIL THAT THE UDR WAS "A PAGE OF THE PAST.....INCAPABLE OF IMAGINING THE FUTURE," RETRACTED HIS COMMENT SHORTLY THEREAFTER IN THE FACE OF CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM HIS UDR COUNTERPART, WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE THE PRIME MINISTER.

6. THE JOBERT PHENOMENON. MICHEL JOBERT'S MOVEMENT OF DEMOCRATS IS STILL REPORTED ALIVE, BUT MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION ALIKE SEEM TO BE HAVING NO DIFFICULTY STAYING AWAY IN DROVES. JOBERT MUST HOPE FOR A MAJOR CRISIS BEFORE HE CAN COUNT POLITICALLY IN FRANCE; FOR THE MOMENT, HE AND HIS ZEALOTS ARE PROVIDING OCCASIONAL ENTERTAINMENT, PARTICULARLY FOR A PARISIAN PRESS WHICH CONTINUES TO TURN TO THE MAN AS A NEWS SOURCE WHEN THE POLITICAL SCENE IS QUIET.

7. THE LEFT - THE ROAD TO MOSCOW. AFTER AN EMBARRASSING FOURTH POSTPONEMENT IN TWO YEARS (REF B), PS FIRST

SECRETARY MITTERRAND FINALLY WENT TO THE SOVIET UNION
WITH THE BACKING OF SOME 80 PERCENT OF HIS PARTY'S
LEADERSHIP (REF C). ALTHOUGH MITTERRAND CUT HIS VISIT
SHORT -- OSTENSIBLY TO RETURN FOR THE FUNERAL OF PCF
SENATOR AND PARTY PATRIARCH JACQUES DUCLOS, BUT IN
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FACT TO MEET SCHEDULED APPOINTMENTS -- THE TRIP DID NOT

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BECOME THE EXERCISE IN PICAYUNE INSULT WHICH SOME PS
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LEADERS HAD FEARED. THE TRIP APPEARS TO HAVE:

- STRENGTHENED THE LEGITIMACY OF THE PS AS A PARTY AUTHENTICALLY OF THE LEFT BOTH WITH RESPECT TO THE PCF AND WITH RESPECT TO ITS OWN LEFT WING;
- ALLOWED THE PS TO CLAIM THAT SOVIET LEADERSHIP HAS "UNDERSTOOD" THE SOCIALISTS' WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO GOVERN -- A PRINCIPLE MUCH DEBATED BY THE PCF;
- ENABLED MITTERRAND TO RESPOND TO PCF SECRETARY-GENERAL MARCHAIS' SUGGESTION THAT HE GO TO THE SOVIET UNION TO "DISCOVER THE REALITIES OF SOCIALISM WITH THE STATEMENT THAT HE "DISCOVERED THE REALITIES OF COMMUNISM."

8. THE PS - "A PARTY OF GOVERNMENT". MITTERRAND'S INSISTENCE ON THE "LEGITIMACY" OF THE UNITED LEFT'S ASPIRATION TO GOVERN FRANCE -- UNDER A LEFT PRESIDENT IF POSSIBLE, UNDER GISCARD IF NECESSARY -- APPEARS TO BE THE PRINCIPAL LESSON WHICH THE PS DRAWS FROM THE TRIP. UNDOUBTEDLY BUOYED BY THE UNEXPECTEDLY LARGE SOCIALIST VICTORY IN PORTUGAL, PS NUMBER TWO PIERRE MAUROY AND OTHER PS LEADERS ARE STRESSING THAT THE SOVIET TRIP WAS MADE BY A PARTY "CALLED TO BECOME A PARTY OF GOVERNMENT" WHICH INTENDS TO PURSUE AN INDEPENDENT LINE OF ITS OWN. MITTERRAND, MAUROY AND THE PARTY WEEKLY ARE ALL STRESSING THAT THE PRINCIPAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PCF AND PS IS THE ISSUE OF A "COMMON PARTY" (IN UNITED LEFT RHETORIC, A SINGLE PARTY CLAIMING TO REPRESENT ALL THE WORKERS) AND ARE IMPLYING THAT PS INDEPENDENCE AND WILLINGNESS TO GOVERN WERE LEGITIMIZED IN MOSCOW. WHILE THIS NEW PS TACTIC IS ONLY A FEW DAYS OLD, THE NATIONAL CONVENTION ON PS/PCF RELATIONS (MAY 3-4; BEING RPTDSEPTTEL) MADE CLEAR THAT THE PS IS PASSING

FROM A DEFENSIVE AND ESSENTIALLY PASSIVE STANCE TO A MORE AGGRESSIVE ONE VIS-A-VIS ITS PCF PARTNER.

9. LABOR. WITH THE SETTLEMENT IN MID-APRIL OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RENAULT AGITATION, THE GOF FACES THE MONTH OF MAY, TRADITIONALLY A DIFFICULT ONE IN LABOR RELATIONS, WITH NO BACKLOG OF UNSETTLED ISSUES (REF D). THE SETTLEMENT, WHICH SUPPOSEDLY GAVE THE WORKERS AN ADDITIONAL 140 FRANCS PER MONTH, WAS IN FACT A COMPENDIUM OF INCREASES WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN NEGOTIATED OR WHICH WERE COMING ANYWAY. PCF AND CONFEDERATION GENERALE DU TRAVAIL (CGT) OFFICIALS HAILED THE SETTLEMENT AS AN IMPORTANT STEP, BUT THERE WERE NO REAL VICTORS IN IT. CGT AND OTHER UNIONS WERE OBVIOUSLY FORCED TO SEEK MANAGEMENT HELP TO BAIL THEMSELVES OUT OF A DIFFICULT BARGAINING SITUATION; THE PCF, TO THE EXTENT THAT IT HAD SLOWLY BECOME INVOLVED, CAME OFF NO BETTER. ONLY THE PS, WHICH AFTER AN ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO INTERVENE -- STIFLED IRONICALLY ENOUGH BY THE PCF -- HAD STAYED OUT OF THE BATTLE, DID NOT LOSE BY THE EXPERIENCE.

10. THE PARISIAN RUMOR MILL. CURRENT INFORMED GUESSING IN POLITICALCIRCLES CONTINUES TO BE THAT THE NEXT CABINET RESHUFFLE WILL TAKE PLACE AROUND JULY. FOREIGN MINISTER SAUVAGNARGUES COULD BE THE FIRST OF GISCARD'S MAJOR MINISTERS TO LEAVE THE GOVERNMENT; POSSIBLE REPLACEMENTS ARE ELYSEE SECRETARY-GENERAL CLAUDE PIERRE-BROSSOLETTE, UN AMBASSADOR LOUIS DE GUIRINGAUD AND STATE SECRETARY FOR AGRICULTURE JEAN-FRANCOIS DENIAU. MINISTER OF EDUCATION HABY, LINKED TO THE REFORM PLAN WHICH BEARS HIS NAME, IS EXPECTED TO BE A SACRIFICIAL OFFERING SHOULD THE REFORM BILL FAIL OR BE PUT ASIDE. MINISTER OF COOPERATION ABELIN MAY ALSO BE ON THE WAY OUT. AND TWO WOMEN CABINET MEMBERS, STATE SECRETARY FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION ANNIE LESUR AND STATE SECRETARY FOR THE PENAL CONDITION HELENE DORLHAC, ARE RUMORED TO BE IN DANGER OF LOSING THEIR PORTFOLIOS. RIDING HIGH THIS MONTH IS STATE SECRETARY FOR UNIVERSITIES JEAN-PIERRE SOISSON, WHO HAS BEEN MENTIONED AS A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO HABY, ABELIN OR ELYSEE PRESS SPOKESMAN ANDRE ROSSI. ONE RUMOR, WHICH SOME OBSERVERS ATTRIBUTED TO LEAKS MADE FOR PARTY ADVANTAGE BY PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC'S OFFICE, HAS IT THAT JUSTICE MINISTER LECANUET, LEADER OF THE CENTER DEMOCRATS, MAY ALSO BE FORCED OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT.

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11. FRENCH SPRING MOOD IS PASSIVE. A CURIOUSLY SILENT MOOD CHARACTERIZES FRANCE DURING THIS EARLY SPRING. LABOR UNIONS, THE PARTIES OF THE UNITED LEFT AND SEVERAL BUSINESS MAGAZINES CONTINUE TO PREDICT A MILLION UNEMPLOYED BY THE END OF THE YEAR; EVEN THE LEAST MARXIST OF THE FRENCH SOCIALISTS CONTINUE TO STATE THAT MODERN CAPITALIST SOCIETY IS ABOUT TO FOUNDER UNDER THE TWIN WEIGHTS OF ITS OWN EXACERBATED CONTRADICTIONS AND THE ENERGY CRISIS. TALK ABOUT A "PROVINCIAL REVOLT" AGAINST HIGH CITY TAXES HAS BECOME A PARISIAN COMMONPLACE, AND EVEN THE ONCE-UNTOUCHABLE SYMBOL OF TRADITIONAL FRANCE, THE WINEGROWERS, HAVE BECOME SUSPECT AS A RESULT OF SCANDALS IN THE BORDEAUX WINE TRADE.

12. IN SPITE OF SUCH PORTENTS OF GLOOM, IF NOT DOOM, THE OVERWHELMING IMPRESSION OF THE CURRENT FRENCH POLITICAL SCENE IS OF NEAR PASSIVITY. FAR FROM LIVING UP TO THEIR ALLEGED LATIN TEMPERAMENT, THE FRENCH SEEM TO BE LIVING THROUGH EACH DAY AS IT COMES, WITH LITTLE EFFORT TO CONFRONT FRANCE'S REAL PROBLEMS. THE PS IS BUSY TALKING ABOUT ITS NEW-FOUND HOLY GRAIL, AUTOGESTION (WORKER MANAGEMENT); THE PCF IS IN A HOLDING PATTERN AS IT SLOWLY DIGESTS THE RESULTS OF MITTERRAND'S MOSCOW TRIP AND THE PS NATIONAL CONVENTION.

13. AND IF THE OPPOSITION IS CALM, IT SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME A DICTUM OF GISCARD'S GOF THAT THE BOAT SHOULD NOT BE ROCKED. WITH SEVERAL WELL-PUBLICIZED REFORMS BEHIND HIM, GISCARD SEEMS CONTENT TO PLAY A WAITING GAME -- TALKING ABOUT THE PROGRAMS TO COME (DIVORCE REFORM, CHANGES IN THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE CITY) WHILE AVOIDING ANY FAR-REACHING DISCUSSION OF HIS ENERGY, FOREIGN OR DEFENSE POLICIES. INDEED, THE HOTTEST CURRENT ISSUE IN FRANCE IS THE LARGELY ECOLOGICAL ONE, CAREFULLY SHIED AWAY FROM BY ALL POLITICAL PARTIES, OF THE FRENCH NUCLEAR PROGRAM. IN SHORT, THE WATERS ARE CALM, THE PRESIDENT IS OFF IN MOROCCO AND FRANCE IS ENJOYING THE SPRING.
RUSH

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